



Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne, *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (London: T&T Clark) 2012.

The contributors to this collection of essays have the singular purpose of blocking access to and hindering usage of the esteemed and ancient practice of attempting to authenticate the words and deeds of Jesus by means of various ‘criteria’.

Away with form criticism. Away with the attempt to authenticate by means of some putative ‘semitic influence’. Away with the horror known as the ‘criterion of coherence’. Down with ‘the criterion of dissimilarity’. Criterion of embarrassment, you embarrass us! Q, die, won’t you please, just die and disappear- for we need thee not as source for our historical reconstruction-ing!

Reading through the essays here assembled I got the distinct impression that I was at the theater watching Lord of the Rings and seeing the wizard stand on the rock bridge screaming at the ancient demon saying ‘YOU SHALL NOT PASS!’ Or, perhaps more colorfully and less charitably, I got the sense that I was crossing a bridge and out jumped nine trolls ordering me to change course lest I die. Or worse, that I give them my firstborn.

But... the trolls are right. The wizard is correct. The various tools of the ancient dark arts no longer work. They're broken, they're dysfunctional. They are, in a word, dead ends. Bultmann (may his memory be for a blessing) has been surpassed (at least in terms of his and the other Form Critic's methodology of Gospel research) and it's high time biblical scholars realize it. And the volume at hand makes it patently clear why.

Anthony Le Donne and Chris Keith have done a brilliant job not only in organizing the volume but in introducing the issues and drawing conclusions. Jens Schröter's discussion of the criteria of authenticity is masterful and should be required reading for any course on the Historical Jesus.

Even better, though (if that's possible), is Loren Stuckenbruck's piece, *"Semitic Influence on Greek": An Authenticating Criterion in Jesus Research?* Fine as well are the contributions of Winter, Rodriguez, Goodacre, Allison, and McKnight.

But best of all is the Preface offered by Morna Hooker. Indeed, her brief piece alone is worth the price of the book. I kid you not. I won't spoil it for you but she observes, for instance,

Perhaps... the time has come to abandon the whole enterprise of trying to discover the "real historical Jesus" (p. xiv).

And again

Perhaps... we shall find the 'real' Jesus, not by seeking for the 'historical' but- as some are now arguing- in looking at the 'memory' that he left. The search for the 'authentic' is in fact a strange conceit (p. xv).

The intellectually stimulating and fertile essays in this volume show exactly why Hooker is right- and has been right- for a very long time.

She further observes

If we want to understand Jesus, we must see him in his own context- very largely a Jewish one- and examine the impact that he made on those who followed him (p. xvii).

Indeed! Or, less academically but more forcefully, ‘no kidding!’

I suggest that it is time to throw away the tools altogether, and to opt for plain common sense (p. xvii).

Alas, if only common sense were as common as we believed. Nonetheless, we can live in the hope that the current collection will jolt a bit of sanity into the Quest for the Historical Jesus.

Two things: first, I too believe that ‘cultural memory’ is the most productive path for future Historical Jesus research. In sum, then, there are only three criteria we should concern ourselves with when we study the subject: 1) Jesus in his own context: 2) Jesus as he impacted those around him (i.e., cultural memory), and 3) common sense.

Clean out your toolbox, student of the Historical Jesus. It’s time to start over. Thankfully the contributors to this volume have closed off the cul-de-sac and there now is no choice but to move in a different direction. The wizard, it seems, is right. **YOU SHALL NOT PASS** this way (that is, the way of Form Criticism) again.

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